

## **GROWING & STRENGTHENING AMERICA'S MIDDLE CLASS**

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### **DEMOCRATS TAKE ACTION ON KEY EDUCATION AND LABOR INITIATIVES**



**110<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS**

**THE HONORABLE GEORGE MILLER  
CHAIRMAN  
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**August 2007**

## **Education and Labor Legislative Accomplishments**

*Education and Labor Committee Members have been hard at work since January getting key measures passed in Committee and in the House to help grow and strengthen America's middle class. By August 3<sup>rd</sup>, the Committee had held 59 hearings and passed over a dozen key education and labor initiatives out of the House.*

### **EDUCATION ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

- ✓ **Making College More Affordable With the Single Largest Increase in College Aid Since GI Bill**
- ✓ **Improving America's Public Schools by Emphasizing Six Key Steps**
- ✓ **Improving Head Start**
- ✓ **Stopping the Student Loan Scandal (Student Loan Sunshine Act)**
- ✓ **Renewing and Improving National Volunteer Community Service Programs**
- ✓ **Pell Grant Increase Signed Into Law for First Time Since 2003 (Included in CR)**
- ✓ **Promoting Pell Grant Fairness/Tuition Sensitivity**
- ✓ **Aid to Gulf Coast Area Schools (Included in War Supplemental)**
- ✓ **Keeping America Competitive**

## LABOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- ✓ ***“Six for ’06” Priority: Increasing the Minimum Wage***
- ✓ ***Employee Free Choice Act: Protecting Workers Rights***
- ✓ ***Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act: Ensuring That Victims of Pay Discrimination Are Treated Fairly***
- ✓ ***Extending Collective Bargaining Rights to Public Safety Workers in All 50 States***
- ✓ ***Preventing Genetic Discrimination***
- ✓ ***Protecting Food Flavoring Workers from Severe Lung Disease (“Popcorn Lung”)***
- ✓ ***Giving Workers Clear Information About 401(k) Fees***
- ✓ ***Preparing Workers for “Green Collar” Jobs to Fight Global Warming***
- ✓ ***Protecting Children from Unsafe Working Conditions***
- ✓ ***Giving Americans Better Access to Mental Health Treatment***
- ✓ ***Providing Leave Time to Military Families (Included in Defense Bill)***

## EDUCATION ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

### ***Making College More Affordable With the Single Largest Increase in College Aid Since the GI Bill***

The College Cost Reduction Act of 2007, passed by the House on July 11 by a vote of 273-149, will provide **the single largest increase in college aid since the GI bill**. And it will do so at **no new cost to taxpayers**, by cutting excess subsidies paid by the federal government to lenders in the student loan industry. 6.8 million students who take out need-based federal student loans each year would see the interest rates on their loans halved over the next five years, saving the typical borrower (with \$13,800 in need-based loan debt) \$4,400 over the life the loan, once fully implemented. The bill also provides a significant boost in Pell Grant scholarships, provides special assistance for the college costs of people who go into public service careers, like nurses, police, firefighters, and first responders, makes loan payments more manageable, and gives upfront tuition assistance to students who commit to teaching in high-need public schools. Earlier, on January 17, the House passed the College Student Relief Act of 2007 by 356-71, which also would have cut the interest rates on subsidized student loans in half -- from the current 6.8 percent to 3.4 percent.



#### **Cutting Interest Rates in Half: Phase-In Schedule**

*\*All interest rate changes will take place in July 1 of each year*

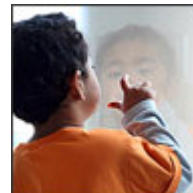
2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
6.12	5.44	4.76	4.08	3.40

## ***Improving America's Public Schools by Emphasizing Six Key Steps***

In 2001, Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act, representing this nation's commitment to closing the achievement gap and helping all children learn by holding states and schools accountable for student academic progress. Today, this is still the right goal and we must not waver from it. But we have learned over the last few years that significant changes are needed if we are serious about achieving that goal. Through discussions with Republicans and Democrats across the country and the ideological spectrum, and through testimony and research received from education experts, civil rights leaders and the business community, Chairman George Miller believes that we can make dramatic improvements to America's education system by taking the following six steps that he plans to advance this September.

- ✓ ***Provide fairness and flexibility.***
- ✓ ***Encourage a rich and challenging learning environment and promote best practices and innovative ideas.***
- ✓ ***Support teachers and principals.***
- ✓ ***Continue to hold schools accountable for students' progress.***
- ✓ ***Improve America's high schools.***
- ✓ ***Invest more in our schools.***

## ***Improving Head Start***



The House passed the "Improving Head Start Act of 2007" on May 2 by a bipartisan vote of 365-48. "Head Start has served our nation's poorest children extremely well in the past four decades.

This bill will help more children arrive at kindergarten ready to succeed by improving program quality and expanding access to more children," said Chairman Miller. Head Start has been the premiere early education program in this country for more than 40 years, serving more than 20 million children in that time.

## ***Stopping the Student Loan Scandal (Student Loan Sunshine Act)***

The Student Loan Sunshine Act was passed by the House on May 9, by an overwhelming vote of 414-3. The Act protects students and parents from exploitation by private student loan lenders and lenders who offer gifts to colleges as a way to secure loan business. The result of these relationships between the lenders and institutions results in more than just limited choices for consumers. Students and families have become the target of aggressive marketing for private loans. Private loans carry interest rates as high as 19 percent, compared to federal loans that are offered at 6.8 percent.

## ***Renewing and Improving National Volunteer Community Service Programs***

On June 27, the Committee overwhelmingly approved legislation to expand and improve key community service programs, including AmeriCorps, VISTA, Senior Corps,

and Learn and Serve America. The Generations Invigorating Volunteerism and Education (GIVE) Act would: 1) increase the number of AmeriCorps volunteers by 25,000 to 100,000 by 2012; 2) increase stipends for



AmeriCorps volunteers; 3) initiate a “Summer of Service” program to give young people from middle school through high school the opportunity to spend a summer in service to their community; and 4) create an AmeriCorps Alumni Reserves Network to tap into the skills and experience of alumni volunteers, with a particular focus on assisting during emergencies or natural disasters.

### ***Pell Grant Increase Signed Into Law for First Time Since 2003 (Included in CR)***

After Democrats Rep. David Obey, Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, and Sen. Robert Byrd, Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, included boosting the Pell Grant scholarship by \$260 to a maximum award of \$4,310 in the budget resolution, President Bush signed the measure into law in February. This was the first increase to be signed into law since 2003, when it was raised by \$50.

### ***Promoting Pell Grant Fairness/Tuition Sensitivity***

The House approved legislation on February 27 that would repeal a rule that unfairly reduces Pell Grant scholarship aid for thousands of low-income college students who attend low-cost colleges and universities. The Pell Grant Equity Act (H.R. 990), introduced by Reps. George Miller and Howard “Buck” McKeon, will provide a one-year fix in order to offer affected students

immediate relief, benefiting approximately 96,000 students in the 2007-2008 academic year – or an average Pell Grant scholarship increase of \$108 per student. The fix will be made permanent when the Education and Labor Committee reauthorizes the Higher Education Act.

### ***Aid to Gulf Coast Area Schools (Included in War Supplemental)***

House Democrats took the lead in securing emergency financial assistance for schools and colleges in Gulf Coast communities devastated by Hurricane Katrina. A disaster supplemental bill signed into law by President Bush on May 25 included \$60 million in federal assistance to address a severe teacher shortage in schools in New Orleans and surrounding areas and to provide funding to schools and colleges in those areas to help them pay off debt and meet other challenges they’ve faced over the past year and a half. In addition, Chairman George Miller and Reps. Charlie Melancon and William Jefferson introduced the Revitalizing New Orleans by Attracting America’s Leaders (RENEWAAL) Act of 2007 on March



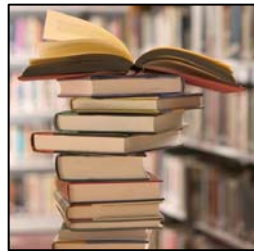
*Flood-damaged library at Southern University at New Orleans*

1 to authorize \$750 million to help recruit and retain teachers in New Orleans and provide assistance to students and colleges and universities.

## ***Keeping America Competitive***

The House and Senate are working in a bipartisan effort to ensure that U.S. students, teachers, businesses and workers are equipped with the tools to compete in the 21st century economy. The issue of competitiveness has been at the top of House Democrats' agenda since November 2005 when the Innovation Agenda was unveiled.

A conference agreement reached on July 31 calls for partnerships that will engage the business community with higher education to create programs to educate and train students to meet industries' needs. It will also ensure a highly qualified teacher in every classroom and encourage math education. The America Creating Opportunities to Meaningfully Promote Excellence in Technology, Education, and Science (COMPETES) Act stems from a bill passed in the Senate and a comparable House bill sponsored by Science and Technology Committee Chairman Bart Gordon.



## **LABOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

### ***“Six for ‘06” Priority: Increasing the Minimum Wage***

After 10 years of stonewalling by the Republican congressional leadership, on July 24 minimum wage workers received their first wage increase in 10 years. This minimum wage boost for the lowest paid 13 million Americans was first passed by the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress on

January 10 with a bipartisan vote of 315-116. President Bush signed the measure into law on May 25 as part of an emergency supplemental appropriations bill. This is a critical first step toward making America more equitable and toward keeping America's economy number one in the world. The Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2007 increases the minimum wage from the current \$5.15 per hour to \$7.25 per hour over the next two years.



**Sen. Edward Kennedy, Rep. George Miller and other lawmakers call for a minimum wage increase.**

### ***Employee Free Choice Act: Protecting Workers Rights***

On March 1, the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA) passed the House, 241-185. EFCA would enable workers to bargain for better wages, benefits, and working conditions by restoring their rights to form unions. A key part of House Democrats' overall goal of strengthening America's middle class, the bill would reform a broken



union election process in which employers frequently intimidate, harass, reassign, or even fire workers who support the formation of a union. The bill also: 1) stiffens penalties against employers who illegally fire or discriminate against workers for their union activity during an organizing or first contract drive, including requiring employers to pay treble back pay to workers whom they are found to have illegally fired; and 2) Allows employers and newly-formed unions to refer bargaining to mediation and, if necessary, binding arbitration if they are not able to agree on a first contract after 90 days of bargaining.

### ***Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act: Ensuring that Victims of Pay Discrimination Are Treated Fairly***



Lilly Ledbetter testifies before the Committee.

On July 31, the House passed the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act to rectify a recent Supreme Court ruling that made it harder for workers to pursue pay discrimination claims. The legislation is named after Lilly Ledbetter, whose pay

discrimination claim was denied by a 5-4 Supreme Court decision on May 29. The court said she had waited too long to sue for pay discrimination, despite the fact that she filed a charge with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission as soon as she received an anonymous note alerting her to pay discrimination. The court ruled that since she did not raise a claim with 180 days of the actual decision to discriminate, she could not receive back pay. The Act would clarify that every paycheck or other compensation resulting, in whole or in

part, from an earlier discriminatory pay decision constitutes a violation of the Civil Rights Act. As long as workers file their charges within 180 days of a discriminatory paycheck, their charges would be considered timely.

### ***Extending Collective Bargaining Rights to Public Safety Workers in All 50 States***

By an overwhelmingly bipartisan vote of 314-97, the House on July 17 passed legislation to guarantee the rights of firefighters, police officers, and emergency medical service workers in all 50 states to collectively bargain for better wages, benefits and working conditions.



The bill would provide basic labor protections for state and local public safety workers, including: 1) the right to join a union; 2) the right to have their union recognized by their employer; 3) the right to bargain collectively over hours, wages and terms and conditions of employment; 4) a mediation or arbitration process for resolving an impasse in negotiations; and 5) enforcement of the bill's provisions through the courts.

### ***Preventing Genetic Discrimination***

The House passed legislation on April 25 to protect personal genetic information from discriminatory use by health insurers and employers. By an overwhelming bipartisan vote of 420-3, the House approved the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2007 (H.R. 493), introduced in January by Reps. Louise Slaughter and Judy Biggert. The legislation would prohibit employers from using individuals' genetic information when making

hiring, firing, job placement or promotion decisions. It would also make it illegal for group health plans and health insurers to deny coverage to healthy individuals or charge them higher premiums based solely on a genetic predisposition to a specific disease.

### ***Protecting Food Flavoring Workers from Severe Lung Disease (“Popcorn Lung”)***



In a bipartisan voice vote, the Committee approved legislation on June 20 to force the Occupational Safety and Health Administration to act to protect workers at food processing plants from exposure to diacetyl, a chemical used in artificial food flavoring commonly used in microwave popcorn. Diacetyl has been linked to bronchiolitis obliterans, also known as “popcorn lung,” a severe, irreversible lung disease that has sickened and killed a number of workers nationwide. Despite the known risks, thousands of workers are still being exposed to the harmful chemical at factories that make or use these flavorings.

### ***Giving Workers Clear Information on 401(k) Fees***

Chairman Miller introduced a bill on July 26 to ensure that American workers have clear and complete information about fees that could be cutting deeply into their 401(k)-style retirement savings. The legislation, the 401(k) Fair Disclosure for Retirement Security Act of 2007, also requires 401(k) plan service providers to clearly disclose all potential conflicts of interest, so that workers and employers can determine for themselves whether service providers are acting in the best interests

of plan beneficiaries. The issue is particularly important given that increasing numbers of American workers are relying on 401(k)s to help them pay for a decent retirement. Nearly 50 million Americans now have a 401(k)-style plan. Past surveys have shown that 80 percent of workers don’t know how much they are paying in fees on their retirement savings accounts.

### ***Preparing Workers for “Green Collar” Jobs to Fight Global Warming***

By a vote of 26 to 18, the House Education and Labor Committee passed legislation on June 27 to help train American workers for jobs in the renewable energy and energy-efficiency industries – industries that are key to U.S. and world efforts to combat global warming. The Green Jobs Act of 2007, introduced by Reps. Hilda Solis and John Tierney, authorizes up to \$125 million in funding to establish national and state job training programs, administered by the U.S. Department of Labor, to help address job shortages that are impairing growth in green industries, such as energy efficient buildings and construction, renewable electric power, energy efficient vehicles, and biofuels development.

### ***Protecting Children from Unsafe Working Conditions***

The House unanimously passed the Child Labor Protection Act of 2007 on June 12. The legislation, sponsored by Rep. Lynn Woolsey, would protect minors by strengthening the Department of Labor’s ability to impose significant penalties for child labor violations where children are killed or seriously injured, and particularly where the violation is repeated or willful. In

cases of labor violations, which cause death or serious injury, the penalties would be increased from \$11,000 to \$50,000 and could be doubled if investigators find that the safety violation was either willful or repeated. Furthermore, penalties would be assessed for each violation.

### ***Giving Americans Better Access to Mental Health Treatment***

On July 18, the Committee approved bipartisan legislation to ensure better access to treatment for people suffering from mental illnesses. The Paul Wellstone Mental Health and Addiction Equity Act would require group health insurance plans to put coverage for mental illnesses on equal footing with physical ailments. Private health insurers generally provide less coverage for mental illnesses than for other medical conditions.

### ***Providing Leave Time to Military Families (Included in Defense Bill)***



Legislation to allow workers to use Family and Medical Leave to deal with issues that arise as a result of the deployment of a spouse, parent, or child to a combat zone like Iraq or Afghanistan was passed by the House on May 17. The measure was offered by Reps. Jason Altmire and Tom Udall as an amendment to the FY 2008 Defense Authorization Bill.



### ***Representative George Miller (D-CA)***

#### ***CHAIRMAN Committee on Education and Labor***

To contact the Committee on Education and Labor, please call (202) 225-3725 or write us:

Committee on Education and Labor  
2181 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

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